

OBADIAH

INTRODUCTION

1. Title. The book is named after the prophet whose message it bears. Obadiah (Heb. *Obadyah*) means “servant of Yahweh.” Obadiah was a common name among the Jews of OT times (see 1 Kings 18:3, 4; 1 Chron. 3:21; 7:3; 12:9; etc.).

2. Authorship. Although a number of OT characters were named Obadiah, none of them can positively be identified as the author of the prophetic book. References to the southern kingdom of Judah indicate that Obadiah belonged to that nation.

3. Historical Setting. Since Obadiah does not identify the kings under whose reigns he ministered, as did Hosea (Hosea 1:1) and others, we are dependent upon internal evidence to determine the date of the book. The problem resolves itself into the question of when the looting of Jerusalem, referred to in vs. 10–14, took place.

According to one view the occasion was the conquest of Jerusalem by the Philistines and the Arabians (see 2 Chron. 21:8, 16, 17). It is assumed that the Edomites were included in the general term “the Arabians,” inasmuch as in the reign of Jehoram, “Edom revolted from under the hand of Judah” (2 Kings 8:20–22). This would place the prophecy of Obadiah in the 9th century B.C. According to a second view Obadiah is referring to the calamities that befell Judah at the time of the Babylonian invasions, culminating in the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. The similarity of Obadiah’s denunciation of Edom to that of Jeremiah (Jer. 49:7–22) and that of Ezekiel (Eze. 25:12–14; 35; cf. Ps. 137:7) has been urged as supporting the later date. This commentary leans to the later date, does so without prejudice toward the possibility of an earlier one (see p. 22).

4. Theme. The book describes the punishment that is to come upon Edom for its cruel attitude toward Judah in a time of crisis, and the ultimate triumph of God’s people and kingdom. The Edomites were the descendants of Esau (Gen. 36:1), the brother of Jacob (Gen. 25:24–26). The hostility that existed between the Edomites and the Jews was particularly bitter, as is often true of family quarrels. This hostility had been of long standing, probably derived from the birthright incident (25). It came to the surface when the descendants of Esau refused permission to the children of Israel to go through their land on the way to Canaan (Num. 20:14–21). The animosity was apparent in the wars that Saul waged against the enemies of his people (1 Sam. 14:47). David took severe measures against the Edomites, slaying “every male” and placing garrisons “throughout all Edom,” making them “servants” (see on 2 Sam. 8:13, 14; 1 Kings 11:15). The clash between the two enemies continued under David’s son, Solomon (1 Kings 11:14–22). During the reign of Jehoshaphat, the Edomites, called “the children of Seir” (see Gen. 32:3; 36:8; Deut. 2:5), together with the Moabites and the Ammonites, invaded Judah (2 Chron. 20:22). The independence they lost under David they regained under Jehoram (2 Chron. 21:8–10). The struggle between Edom and the Israelites was again taken up when Amaziah of Judah successfully attacked the Edomites, capturing their stronghold, Sela, and putting many of them to death (2 Kings 14:1, 7; 2 Chron. 25:11, 12). Still incompletely subdued, they again attacked Judah in the time of Ahaz (2 Chron. 28:17). When Jerusalem was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar the Edomites rejoiced over the calamities that befell Judah (see on Ps. 137:7).

Following the pronouncement of doom upon Edom the prophet turns to promises of restoration for Israel. The house of Jacob would again “possess their possessions” (Obadiah 17), and extend their boundaries (vs. 19, 20).

5. Outline.

- I. The Prediction of Doom Upon Edom, 1–16.
 - A. Summons to heathen nations to attack Edom, 1, 2.
 - B. The pride of Edom, 3, 4.
 - C. The completeness of Edom’s overthrow, 5–9.
 - D. Edom’s hatred of the Jews, 10–14.
 - E. Edom’s punishment in the day of the Lord, 15, 16.
- II. The Triumph and Restoration of Israel, 17–21.

1 *The destruction of Edom, 3 for their pride, 10 and for their wrong unto Jacob. 17 The salvation and victory of Jacob.*

1. The vision. The four introductory words constitute the title of the book. Obadiah does not identify the time in which he lived. The date of his prophecy must be deduced from internal evidence (see p. 22).

Edom. The Edomites, descended from Esau, were consequently related by blood to the Israelites (Gen. 36:1). Their territory lay south of the Dead Sea along the Arabah, extending southward for a distance of about 100 mi. (160 km.).

We have heard. The LXX reads, “I have heard.”

Rumour. Heb. *shemu‘ah*, “a report,” “news,” “tidings.”

Ambassador. Heb. *šir*, “messenger.”

2. I have made. The tense here may be regarded as a prophetic perfect, and hence be translated, “I will make.” Events yet to occur are spoken of as already accomplished. The use of this tense emphasizes the certainty of fulfillment.

3. In the clefts. The territory of Edom was mountainous. The names, “mount Seir” and “the mount of Esau” (see Joshua 24:4; Obadiah 8), are therefore singularly appropriate.

Rock. Heb. *sela‘*, “rock,” which may be transliterated “Sela” and thus designate an important city of Edom. Sela was later called Petra by the Greeks. It occupied an excellent defensive position, lying in a narrow valley surrounded by precipitous cliffs (see on Jer. 49:16).

Bring me down. A boastful, arrogant claim. The descendants of Esau felt secure in the fastnesses of their natural defenses. Compare the boastful pride of Pharaoh (Ex. 5:1, 2) and of Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 4:28–31).

4. As the eagle. It is characteristic of the eagle to build its nest among the high rocks (Job 39:27, 28).

Among the stars. A colorful illustration of Edom’s defenselessness against the coming judgments.

5. Thieves. Heb. *gannabim*, from the root *ganab*, the verb used in the Decalogue command against stealing (Ex. 20:15).

Robbers. From the Heb. *shadad*, “to devastate,” “to despoil,” “to deal violently with,” hence “despoilers.” It is usually the case with thieves and plunderers that they take

some things but spare others. To accentuate, however, the full destruction that will come to Edom, Obadiah in contrast shows that nothing will be spared.

Grapegatherers. The Israelites were forbidden by law to pluck a vineyard clean (Lev. 19:10; Deut. 24:21). No such beneficent provision would be in the mind of Edom's despoilers.

6. Searched out. That is, thoroughly searched. The reading, "How Esau has been pillaged" (RSV), has been based in part upon the LXX.

Hidden things. Heb. *mašpunim*, "hidden treasures."

7. Thy confederacy. The phrase reads literally, "all the men of thy covenant," that is, those allied to Edom.

To the border. Several interpretations of this phrase are possible: (1) The Edomites themselves were dispossessed and driven to their borders. (2) Edomite ambassadors, appealing to the allies for aid, were conducted to the borders with their requests unanswered. (3) The allies forsook the Edomites at their borders and abandoned them to their enemies. (4) Edomite refugees were refused shelter and sent back to their borders.

Men that were at peace. This phrase appears to be parallel with "men of thy confederacy."

Wound. Heb. *mazor*, the meaning of which is uncertain. The word, perhaps from a different root, is found in Jer. 30:12 and Hosea 5:13 with the meaning "boil," or "ulcer." But in Obadiah 7 such a meaning gives no sense. The LXX has *enedra*, "an ambush." The translation "trap" (RSV) is evidently based on the LXX.

None understanding. Or, as we would say today, "no understanding."

In him. The LXX reads, "among them." The reference may be to the perplexity and bewilderment that would come upon the Edomites when deceived by their trusted allies.

8. Destroy the wise men. Edom was evidently noted for its wisdom (Jer. 49:7).

Mount of Esau. See on v. 3.

9. Teman. A district in, or a name for, Edom (see on Jer. 49:7).

10. Thy violence. See p. 987.

Shame. Compare Jer. 3:25; Micah 7:10.

11. Thou stoodest. On the basis of the date of Obadiah adopted by this commentary the events of vs. 10–14 refer to the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C. (see p. 987).

12. Thou shouldest not. Verses 12–14 relate, in vivid poetic structure, the unfeeling conduct of Edom against Judah.

Have looked. That is, with malicious satisfaction.

Became a stranger. This phrase translates a single Hebrew word, *neker*, perhaps better translated "misfortune." The complete phrase would then read, "in the day of his misfortune."

Spoken proudly. Literally, "enlarged thy mouth," possibly in boastful talk. An ascending climax has been observed in this verse: first, the satisfied look, then the malicious joy, and lastly the exulting expression of boastfulness and insulting derision.

13. Not have entered. Compare Eze. 35:5.

14. Thou have stood. The crime here mentioned seems to be that of cutting off the fugitives of Judah and delivering them up as captives. As a neighbor of Judah the

Edomites were doubtless better acquainted with the escape routes than were the Babylonians.

15. The day of the Lord. In connection with the restoration of Judah (vs. 17–21) would have come a day of judgment upon the nations. For a definition of the expression “day of the Lord” see on Isa. 13:6. The prophecies of doom upon Edom should be understood in the light of the prophecies concerning Israel’s future. Inasmuch as the promises of restoration of Israel were conditional, and Israel failed to meet the conditions, not all the details of the predictions of doom were fulfilled (see p. 34; see on Eze. 34:11, 14).

Thy reward. Better, “thy doing.” Thus it will be in the final judgment. Everyone will “receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad” (2 Cor. 5:10; cf. Rev. 22:12).

16. As ye have drunk. Some hold that the opening clause is addressed to the Israelites who had drunk the cup of God’s anger for their sins (Isa. 51:17). God’s people had been punished; so would the heathen be. Others think that since Obadiah is dealing specially with the Edomites, these words refer to them. The phrase “upon my holy mountain” might then allude to scenes of revelry and drinking such as probably occurred at celebrations in Jerusalem after Judah’s downfall.

Continually. Heb. *tamid*. For a definition of *tamid* see on Dan. 8:11. Perpetuity cannot be intended, because after the drinking the nations will be “as though they had not been.” For *tamid* many Hebrew manuscripts read *sabib*, “round about.” The LXX reads “wine,” probably from *chemer*, somewhat similar in the Hebrew to *tamid*.

They had not been. The LXX reads, “they shall be as though not existing.” The expression denotes complete destruction. The nations in opposition to God would cease to exist.

The words of this expression have frequently been used to describe the ultimate fate of the wicked (see EGW comments at end of this chapter). The wicked will be totally annihilated. “Both soul and body” will be destroyed “in hell” (Matt. 10:28). This is the “second death” (Rev. 20:13–15). The Bible gives us no warrant for the doctrine of an ever-burning hell in which the lost will suffer punishment without end.

The destruction of the wicked will not be an act of arbitrary power on the part of God simply to show His authority and moral sovereignty. True, it will be a display of His sovereign power, but a display made necessary because the ungodly have regrettably formed such characters as will entirely unfit them for the sanctity and purity of the home of the redeemed. It will be a mercy to spare them an existence that would be most repulsive and hateful to their evil nature (see GC 36, 37; DA 107, 763, 764; SC 18).

17. Mount Zion. The site that had suffered indignity at the hands of Edom and the other nations (v. 16) would experience a glorious redemption.

Deliverance. Heb. *peleṭah*, “an escape,” “salvation,” or “what [or who] escapes.”

There shall be holiness. Or, “it [mount Zion] shall be holy,” which is the reading of the LXX.

Possess their possessions. That is, after the return from exile. The promises of vs. 17–21 were never completely fulfilled because of the failure of the Jews in exile and after exile to effect the spiritual revival necessary to make possible the accomplishment of their divine destiny. See pp. 32–34.

18. House of Joseph. The kingdom of Israel, so called because Joseph was the father of Ephraim (see Gen. 41:50–52), the most important tribe of the northern kingdom. According to the divine plan the two kingdoms were to be brought together as one people (see Eze. 37:19; Hosea 1:11; Zech. 10:6; see on Obadiah 19).

Not be any remaining. Some see in these words a prediction of the victories of John Hyrcanus over the Idumaeans not long before 100 B.C. (Josephus *Antiquities* xiii. 9. 1). However, it should be remembered that the fulfillment of this prediction was dependent upon the fulfillment of the predictions of restoration for Judah. Inasmuch as the latter were conditional (see p. 34) and largely unfulfilled, it is impossible to fix upon any specific event as a complete fulfillment of the former.

19. South. Heb. *negeb*, the Negeb, or dry country to the south of Judah (see on Joshua 15:19).

Plain. Heb. *shephelah*, the Shephelah, the name of the strip of country consisting of low hills situated between the mountains of Judah and the coastal plain (see on Joshua 15:33).

Fields of Samaria. The redistribution of territory here indicated, with Judah and Benjamin occupying territories formerly held by the ten tribes, was doubtless due to the fact that “to the ten tribes, long rebellious and impenitent, was given no promise of complete restoration to their former power in Palestine” (PK 298). Individual Israelites had the privilege of joining the new state, but there was to be only one nation.

20. The captivity. The Hebrew of v. 20 is obscure. The KJV, if the supplied words are omitted, gives a fairly literal rendering except that the word for “host,” *chel*, should probably be rendered “rampart.” But what rampart is referred to is not certain. Reading *Chalach* for *Chel* gives the name of the north Mesopotamian town of Halah, to which Israelitic captives were taken (see 2 Kings 17:6; 18:11; 1 Chron. 5:26).

Zarephath. A coastal town of Phoenicia now called *Şarafand* (see 1 Kings 17:9), about 9 mi. (14.4 km.) south of Sidon and 13 1/2 mi. (21.6 km.) north-northeast of Tyre.

Sepharad. The place is mentioned only here and the location is uncertain. It was a seat of exiles from Jerusalem. Sardis in Asia Minor has been suggested, as well as a place in southwest Media. The LXX reads “Ephratah.”

21. And saviours. Obadiah closes his prophecy on a triumphant note with the assurance of full and complete redemption for Zion. Mt. Zion is contrasted with the mount of Esau, God’s holy mount with the mountains of human pride. The “saviours” may be those who come from the lands of captivity mentioned in v. 20 to help Jerusalem against her enemies. The LXX gives a somewhat different meaning, “and men who have been saved shall go up out of mount Zion to execute vengeance upon the mount of Esau.”

Shall be the Lord’s. A fitting climax to Obadiah’s prophetic message as indeed to the record of human history. The day is coming when the pronouncement will go forth, “The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever” (Rev. 11:15).

ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

¹Nichol, F. D. (1978). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary : The Holy Bible with exegetical and expository comment*. Commentary Reference Series (Ob 1). Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association.